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# Navy Nurse Corps: An Exquisite Heritage

eritage can be viewed in several ways. On one level heritage is the tradition that gives meaning to present day action. It is Navy medical personnel wearing oak leaves or caducei devices on their uniforms. It is the uniform and how it is worn. Heritage can also be viewed as a collection of stories, the names and acts of pioneers, and their achievements; it is everything deemed good and bad; it is the successes and failures, the oversights and recognitions; it is the makeup of a person's character, and the soul of an organization.

The early years of the Nurse Corps saw the pioneering "Sacred Twenty" lay down a foundation of service and caring that, ever since, has defined the Corps. For the past 100 years, the rolls of the Navy Nurse Corps have in-

cluded many who served overseas and on the front lines; Navy nurses who have lived and died in contagious disease wards during the Spanish Influenza epidemic; Navy Nurses who have treated and cared for many sick and wounded in World War I base hospitals, at World War II prisoners of war camps and in Pacific bases, and aboard hospital ships and evacuation aircraft in World War II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and during the first Gulf War.

It is true to say that from 1908 to 2008, the Nurse Corps has been shaped by service and sacrifice, and today's nurses can boast of owning an exquisite heritage.

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U.S. Navy Nurse Corps Miscellany, 1908-2008 is a means of presenting part of this exquisite heritage—the notable achievements, significant firsts, tragic losses that affected the

Nurse Corps; a record of uniforms from its inception; and a section containing the names of film and television programs featuring Navy nurses.



## Sacred Twenty—13 May 1908

On 13 May 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Naval Appropriations Bill that authorized the establishment of the Nurse Corps as a unique staff corps of the Navy. Applications to the Nurse Corps were sent to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery from around the na-

tion. Candidates were required to travel to Washington, DC, at their own expense and take an oral and written examination. The nucleus of this new Nurse Corps was a superintendent (Esther Hasson), a chief nurse (Lenah Higbee), and 18 other women—all would later be known as the "Sacred Twenty."

Josephine Beatrice Bowman, one of these pioneers,

and later superintendent of the Nurse Corps, recalled that these "nurses were assigned to duty at the Naval Hospital, Washington, DC. There were no quarters for them but they were given an allowance for quarters and subsistence. They rented a house and ran their own mess. These pioneers were no more

welcome to most of the personnel of the Navy, than women are when invading what a man calls his domain."

# First expansion of Nurse Corps—1909

Many nurses were reluctant to travel to Washington, DC, at their own expense to take the examination. In lieu of this examination, Surgeon General Presley Rixey ordered that applicants submit an origi-

# **Uniform Requirements**

During the first six months after reporting for duty, any plain white uniform may be worn but it must conform in length of skirt and sleeves with the uni-

> form regulation. With this uniform nurses are required to wear the Navy Nurse cap which is procured upon arrival at the first station of duty. After the completion of a probationary period of six months, if physical examination and all recommendations prove their aptitude and fitness for the service, nurses and re-

serve nurses are required to wear the regulation uniform and they may apply for the initial issue of six uniforms provided by the Navy. The naval hospital which ...[is] equipped with laundries will launder the uniforms which have been worn on duty, not to exceed 4 in a week. Nurses are required to meet the expenses of their personal laundry other than uniforms.



nal essay on the topic of nursing practices. In 1909, the Nurse Corps doubled in size and three nurses were authorized promotion as "chief nurse." This was also the year that the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) began sending its corps of nurses to medical facilities outside of Washington, DC. Naval hospitals Annapolis, MD, Brooklyn, NY, and Mare Island, CA, were among the first hospitals to receive nurses. In spring 1909, Surgeon James Leys, commanding officer, Naval Hospital Norfolk, VA, requested BUMED to send "nurses" to his hospital. When three female nurses (Lenah Higbee, Ethel Swann, and Mary Nelson) reported for duty, Surgeon Leys was aghast. He had fully expected to receive male hospital corpsmen and did not know how they could work in a hospital without a single female patient. These nurses took command of the situation and demonstrated that they could fit in.

## Navy Nurse Corps Overseas—1910-1911

Navy nurses were sent to medical facilities overseas including Canacao, Philippines; Guam; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Haiti; Honolulu, HI; Samoa; and the Virgin Islands. In 1911, the



During the First World War, Navy nurses served aboard the troop transports USS *Henderson* and USS *George Washington* when transporting President Woodrow Wilson to France. After 1943, Navy nurses would yet again serve on *Henderson* when it was known as the Navy hospital ship USS *Bounti*ful. Navy Medical Department established training schools in Guam, Samoa, and the Virgin Islands where Navy nurses educated native populations in health and hygiene. In his report dated 1917, Surgeon General William Braisted stated that the work of the nurses stationed at these training facilities is "entirely altruistic and the interest and labors of the members of the Navy Nurse Corps is fully appreciated."

#### Naval Reserve Force—1916

On 26 August 1916, Congress established the Naval Reserve Force. The Navy Medical Department could now recruit nurses under its provisions.

#### Nurses in World War I—1917-18

On the eve of the war the Navy Nurse Corps comprised 160 military nurses. Under the command of Superintendent Lenah Higbee, the Corps

would grow to 1,034 nurses by the Armistice in 1918. During the war, Superintendent Higbee helped pioneer a new training program to augment the number of nurses being deployed to naval base hospitals in France and the United Kingdom when trained nurses were in short supply.

The "Vassar Training Camp" served as a finishing school for many of these nurses. For her efforts, Higbee was awarded the Navy Cross.

#### Spanish Flu Nurses—1918-19

One might say that the war ended with a cough, not a bang. In 1918, the year of the Armistice, more people died from "Spanish Influenza" than from combat. Of course, the Spanish flu pandemic

#### **Did You Know?**

In World War I, 327 Navy nurses served overseas at clinics in London, England, and L'Orient, France, and base hospitals in Brest, France; Leith and Inverness, Scotland; and in Queenstown, Ireland.

that wreaked havoc across the world was a misnomer. It is believed that the disease began at a Kansas army training facility in 1917, spreading throughout North America, and was brought to the European front by American troops. Somehow, as a result of increasing human antibodies, the virus mutated. When it reappeared in the United States in the fall of 1918, influenza had brought on the added complication of pneumonia. Health providers could only treat symptoms of the disease. In 1918, Navy and Marine patients totaling 121,225 were admitted at Navy medical facilities with influenza amassing over one million sick days. Of the heroes who treated them some made the ultimate sacrifice.



Influenza ward at Naval Hospital Mare Island, CA, 1918.

Thirty-one were nurses, all of whom were awarded the British Victoria Cross. Three of these

# **Military Recognition**

In a letter written in March 1921, while serving aboard the hospital ship USS Relief, Chief nurse Beatrice Bowman wrote: "Had you been a Navy nurse you would

have saluted the Flag as you came over the side. We are proud of this honor and I have not yet grown so old in years or in the Service, but that to look upon the Stars and Stripes makes little thrills run up and down my spine, and in my heart I have always saluted "Our Flag." That the time has come when we are a part of the military forces and are expected to carry out that military recognition makes us feel more than ever the love of country and its emblem. I will tell you secretly

tho', that the first time of going over the side on liberty and saluting when you feel that the entire population of the surrounding country has spy glasses leveled upon you—is not the easiest thing to do. However like a cold bath after the first plunge I liked it."

# Part of the Navy Establishment—1920

Lillian Murphy received the Navy Cross.

women— Marie Louise Hidell, Edna Place, and

The Naval Appropriations Act on 4 July 1920 recognized the Navy Nurse Corps as part of the "Navy Establishment." This act enabled dependents of ac-

tive duty nurses to receive up to "six months pay from death resulting from illness or injury in the line of duty."



Eleven nurses reported aboard the hospital ship USS *Relief*. They are the first female military nurses to serve aboard a hospital ship.

# Knickerbocker Theater— 1922

In January 1922, a snow storm collapsed the roof of the Knicker-bocker Theater in Washington,

DC, killing 97 patrons. Navy nurses Anne K. Harkins and Florence M. Vevia, stationed at the Naval Dispensary in Washington, DC, reported to the scene to render medical assistance.

#### Education Program—1922

The Navy Medical Department instituted an education program whereby Navy nurses were assigned to take advanced courses in dietetics (at Miss Farmer's School of Cookery in Boston, MA), laboratory technique (Naval Medical School, Washington, DC), anesthesia (at School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA), and physiotherapy (at Naval Hospital New York, NY).

#### Nurses Granted Retirement—1926

With the passage of Public Law 217 on 13 May 1926, Navy nurses could retire knowing they had the same benefits of service coming to them. This law provided retirement "after 30 years service" or "at age 50 with 20 years of service."

#### National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers—1928

On 28 March 1928, Congress authorized disabled Army and Navy nurses to hospitalization at the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (later known as the Home Service of the Veterans Affairs).

#### Government Medical Care—1929

On 19 January 1929, Congress authorized Navy nurses (active or retired) to receive hospitalization and medical care at other government hospitals when Navy medical facilities were not available.



Long Beach in 1933.

## Disability for Nurses—20 June 1930

President Herbert Hoover passed the Disability Act for Army and Navy nurses on 20 June 1930. If a Navy nurse became disabled in the line of duty "she shall be retired from active service and placed upon the Nurse Corps retired list...in the appropriate grade in which she belonged at the time of her retirement and with retired pay at the rate of 75% of the active service pay."

## Long Beach, CA Earthquake—1933

A field hospital from USS *Relief* was established in the city from where Navy nurses provided medical care to those affected by the destruction.

# End of an Era—1935

On 1 January 1935, Superintendent Josephine Beatrice Bowman, the last of the "Sacred Twenty" on active duty, retired from the Nurse Corps.

#### Pearl Harbor—7 December 1941

December 7, 1941 still represents the U.S. Navy's greatest disaster. In just over two hours much of the Pacific Fleet had been destroyed or seriously damaged. Even before the last Japanese aircraft had disappeared over the horizon, what the raiders had accomplished by their sur-

prise attack was catastrophic. The pride of the fleet—seven battleships that once projected U.S. might and prestige—either lay on the bottom or were too crippled to be of any immediate use. Bombs, torpedoes, and machine guns had taken a terrible toll, with the Navy alone losing 2,008 men. The wounded and severely burned survivors of the attack required immediate treatment, and Navy medical personnel were on the scene to provide that care. Navy medicine was represented at Pearl Harbor by a naval hospital, a partially assembled base hospital, and USS *Solace* (AH-5), the Navy's newest hospital ship. Heroic efforts to save lives by the men and women who manned these facilities began minutes after the first Japanese bomb fell and never waned until the last casualty was tended to.

On board the Solace, LTJG Grace Lally, NC was a witness to the devastation. "I looked out

the port hole and saw the ...planes machinegunning boys on a battleship. . . I realized that what we thought couldn't happen was happening, and I thought we ought to set up the emergency ward. Some of the boys overboard were fished out of the water, covered with oil or badly burned or both, and suffering." LTJG Lally organized the 12 other nurses on *Solace*. The *Solace*'s nursing staff treated 327 burn cases from that first day, working three full days without sleep. Lally would recall, "We could hear the fighting raging outside and wondered what was happening. But our job was inside the ship, and there we stayed for 10 days."

# First Prisoners of War—10 December 1941

On 10 December 1941, five Navy nurses (including future Nurse Corps Director, Leona Jackson) were captured on Guam and sent to a military prison at Zentsuji, Japan. In August 1942, they were returned to the United States aboard the exchange ship *Gripsholm*.

# Band of Angels— January 1942

On 6 January 1942, 11 nurses were taken prisoner by the Imperial Japanese forces in the Philippines. During their 37-month imprisonment, the



# "Band of Angels" Roster

Mary F. Chapman Goldie A. O'Haver

Laura Cobb Eldene E. Paige

Bertha R. Evans Susie J. Pitcher

Helen C. Gorzelanski Dorothy Still

Mary R. Harrington C. Edwina Todd

Margaret A. Nash

nurses interned at Santo Tomás (just outside Manila), continued to care for the sick and injured despite the fact that they suffered from malnutrition, beri-beri, and chronic dysentery themselves. Their service and example of selfless devotion under extreme difficulties provided a rallying point for the morale of their fellow prisoners. After being released, nurse POW CDR C. Edwina Todd remembered, "Practically all equipment was taken away by the Japanese before we moved in. Fortunately for us they left a wash basin and the operating table; they were screwed down. Our supplies consisted of a hot water bottle that soon held the world record for vulcanization, and five sheets. We made all of our own dressings from donated clothing and worn out mosquito nets. Miss O'Haver [one of the nurse POWs] made operating room gowns

and pajama coats out of shorts; she also made us uniforms out of dungaree material. Medical treatment varied from week to week, depending upon the medicines we had on hand."

## Permanent Relative Rank—3 July 1942

Public Law 654 granted Navy nurses "permanent relative rank" of commissioned officers.

## First Gold Striper—1942

Public law 828 granted the superintendent of the Nurse Corps relative rank. Navy nurse superintendent Sue Dauser became the first woman in the Navy to serve as a captain. CAPT Sue Dauser (1888-1972) received her commission in the Navy on 16 October 1917. Over the course of her long and accomplished career she served at Naval Base Hospital 3 (Leith, Scotland); Naval Hospitals Canacao, PI; Mare Island, CA; Puget Sound, WA; San Diego, CA; San Francisco, CA; and Naval Dispensary Long Beach, CA. In 1923, CAPT Dauser was one of two Navy nurses (the other being Ruth Powderly) assigned to duty aboard USS *Henderson* to care for President Warren G. Harding on his goodwill tour to Alaska. CAPT Sue Dauser served as the Nurse Corps superintendent from 1939 through World War II. She lead the Nurse Corps through its largest growth—from 439 in 1939 to 10,968 at the close of the war. CAPT Sue Dauser retired from the Navy on 1 April 1946.

## Legion of Merit—1942

In 1942, Public Law No. 671 established a the Legion of Merit award for members of the Armed Forces, as well as personnel of the armed forces of friendly foreign nations, "who have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service." The first naval recipient of this medal was nurse LTJG Ann Bernatitus. Her



LTJG Stephany Kozak (far left) and LTJG Dymphna Van Gorp (far right) stand with two students in the flight evacuation program, October 1944.

citation read: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as a member of Surgical Unit No. 5 during the Japanese attack on the Philippines Nurse Bernatitus maintained her position in the front lines of the Manila-Bataan area rendering efficient and devoted service during the prolonged siege."

#### Nurses in Brazil—1943

At the request of the Brazilian government, three Navy nurses were sent to Rio de Janeiro to establish a flight nursing school for "air evacuation training." For their efforts, Navy nurses LT Catherine Kain, LTJG Dymphna Van Gorp, and LTJG Stephany Kozak were awarded Navy Commendation medals.

## Full Military Rank—26 February 1944

Legislation enacted on 26 February 1944 granted Navy nurses full military rank.

#### Dutch Harbor Nurses – 1944

On 23 April 1944, Chief Nurse Lucile Hendricks, and nurses Ruby Toquam and Helen Roehler were flying to Altor Point for the day. The plane in which they were flying was caught in a down-draft from a volcano, killing all aboard

#### USS Higbee is commissioned—1944

In November 1944, the destroyer, USS Highee was commissioned. The ship was named for former Nurse Corps superintendent Lenah Higbee. The ship was the first to be named after a living woman and the only ship to be named for a Navy nurse.

# Flight Nurses on Iwo Jima—1945

In February 1945, LTJG Jane Kendeigh, NC, landed on Iwo Jima. A graduate of the Naval School of Air Evacuation at Naval Air Station, Alameda, CA, she is considered the first Navy flight nurse on a Pacific battlefield. Later LTJG Kendeigh and other flight nurses evacuate some 1,700 battle casualties on Okinawa in the first three weeks of operation. Another flight nurse, LTJG Kathryn Van Wagner, a flight nurse sent to Okinawa would recall, "I had never heard of Iwo Jima...the first flight was unreal...the fighting was going on very close to the plane. When I got the patients some of them had injuries only 20 minutes old. On the way to Saipan, I never covered the faces of the ones who had died. When I made rounds I stopped at their litters and spoke to them...I didn't want the others to know that anyone had been lost."

# First African-American Navy Nurse—1945

On 8 March 1945, Phyllis M. Daley was commissioned in the Navy Nurse Corps becoming the first African-American to achieve such distinction. ENS Daley served at the Naval Dispensary in Boston, MA, until the end of the war.

#### Nurses in World War II—1945

Throughout the war, Navy nurses served at 40 naval hospitals, 176 dispensaries, on board 12 hospital ships, and as flight nurses on air evacuation missions. Admiral Halsey said of Navy nurses, "They magnificently upheld the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service." Throughout the war, Navy nurses earned over 300 military awards for their magnificent duty.

#### Native Nurse School—1945

In December 1945, the Navy re-established school for native nurses and medical practitioners in Guam. The first class consisted of 30 medical and 25 nursing students from the Marshalls, Gilberts, Carolines, Marianas, and Samoa. Many arrived unable to speak English; some only a local dialect. The medical course was four and a half years,



Flight nurse on Iwo Jima.

the first year was devoted to language. The second year was devoted primarily to the basic sciences and for the last two and a half years students were given intensive training in the basic medical sciences and the diseases most prevalent in the Pacific. The school was transferred to the Department of the Interior in 1950 and disbanded in 1952.

## Recognition as Staff Corps—16 April 1947

Army-Navy Nurses Act (Public Law 36) of 1947 made the Navy Nurse Corps an official staff corps of the U.S. Navy and gave its members permanent officer status with commensurate pay and allowances. The title of "superintendent" of the Nurse Corps was changed to "director."

#### Korean War—1950

North Korea's invasion of South Korea in June 1950 marked the beginning of the Korean War. The Navy Nurse Corps played a pivotal role in caring for the sick and injured at 26 naval hospitals, 67 station hospitals and dispensaries around the globe, and aboard three hospital ships and eight Military Sea Transport Service ships. In 1951, the Nurse Corps reached a peak strength of 3,218 active duty nurses.

#### Benevolence *Lost*—1950

On 25 August 1950, while returning from sea trails, prior to her assignment to the Military Sea Transportation Service, USS *Benevolence* (AH-13) collided with the freighter *Mary Luckenbach* and sank off San Francisco. Out of the 518 who were on board the hospital ship 23 perished, including Navy nurse Wilma Ledbetter.

# Kwajalein Crash—1950

On 19 September 1950, a Navy VR-21 plane that had just taken off from Kwajalein Island—some 2,100 nautical miles southwest of Honolulu—crashed into the Pacific, exploding upon impact. There were no survivors. Of the 26 passengers on board, only four bodies and a few personal possessions were ever found. Among the dead were 11 Navy Nurse Corps officers. The accident marked the largest reported loss of military nurses in history, and one of the greatest tragedies ever to befall the Navy Medical Department. LTJG Jeanne E Clarke, NC, USNR; LTJG Alice S. Giroux, NC, USN; LTJG Calla Goodwin, NC, USNR; LTJG Constance A.

# **Inspired by True Events**

LTJG Sarah Griffin's work at Naval Hospital Oakland served as the inspiration for an episode of the CBS television series *Navy Log* in 1956. The episode entitled "Not a Leg to Stand on" featured actress Veda Ann Borg as LTJG Griffin. Although known mainly as a B-movie actress, Borg would achieve some renown portraying the character "Blind Nell Robertson" in the John Wayne film *The Alamo* (1960).

Heege, NC, USNR; LTJG Margaret G. Kennedy, NC, USNR; LTJG Mary E. Lijegreen, NC, USN; ENS Eleanor C. Beste, NC, USN; ENS Marie M. Boatman, NC, USN; ENS Jane Eldridge, NC, USN; ENS Constance R. Esposito, USN; ENS Edna J. Rundell, NC, USN.

# Naval Hospital Oakland Nurse Makes History—October 1950

LTJG Sarah Griffin is recalled to duty making history as the only Navy nurse amputee serving on active service. Throughout the Korean War, LTJG Griffin served as a physical therapy nurse in Naval Hospital Oakland's amputee center.

## Operation Repatriation—1954

When French colonial rule in Indochina came to a chaotic end in 1954 following the climactic defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. Navy helped evacuate 721 French troops and transport them back to their homes in France and North Africa. The hospital ship USS *Haven*, which had already seen action in World War II and four tours during the Korean War, was again pressed into service for the trip. Navy nurses onboard were called to take care of the demoralized soldiers, most of whom were French Foreign Legionnaires.

Haven nurse LT Anna Corcoran later recalled of the voyage, "I was assigned to the lowest deck where we had patients, the E deck, I think. There were two wards and there were 87 patients in each ward. We had triple-deck bunks. On that floor they all had to be able to walk up stairs to get their



Aboard USS Haven.

meals because there was no elevator that came all the way down and therefore no food carts could come down.

I will never forget sick call. Most of the patients down there were Foreign Legionnaires and many did not speak English or French but mostly Arabic. We had one man (legionnaire) who was our interpreter. He had been a German SS trooper and had been a prisoner in Canada. He spoke perfect English, perfect French, perfect German, and a little Arabic. When we had sick call, the doctor would stand on the second bunk to examine the guy in the third bunk and the interpreter would squat on top of the third bedside table. Then the doctor would ask a question, the interpreter would ask the patient, and then the answer was relayed back to the doctor. It was certainly a very interesting and very different sick call than I'd ever done before or since."

## Nursing Division Established—1955

A Navy nursing division was established at the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to "develop, coordinate, evaluate and advise the Surgeon General on matters relating to personnel policy, military requirements, and professional qualifications of Nurse Corps officers."

# Navy Nurses and the Hungarian Revolt—1957

In 1957, following the bloody revolt against the communist government in Hungary, six Navy nurses were chosen to take part in the "emergency program of assistance" providing medical aid to Hungarian refugees being relocated to the United States.

#### White House Nurses—1961

In February 1961, Navy Nurse Corps officers LTJG Elizabeth Chapowicki and LTJG Dolores Cornelius were assigned to the White House Medical Unit (WHMU). Although, Navy nurses have attended to the medical care of the president as far back as the Woodrow Wilson administration, Chapowicki and Cornelius were the first military nurses to serve in the WHMU.

# Hurricane Relief—1961

In September 1961, four Navy nurses (LCDR Miriam Frank, LT Janice Langley, LTJG Mary Freeman, and LTJG Joan Helgendoff), stationed at Naval Hospital Pensacola, FL, participated

in the relief effort on the Texas coast following Hurricane "Carla." In November 1961, four nurses— LCDR Audrey Fellabaum, LTJG Mary McArdle, LTJG Patricia Cope, and ENS Joan Beasley—sailed aboard USS *Antietam* to Honduras to provide medical relief following the devastating Hurricane "Hattie."

## Nurse Anesthesia Program—1962

The Nurse Corps Anesthesia program was established at the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, MD.

#### Brink Barracks—1965

Four nurses stationed in Saigon were wounded in the terrorist bomb explosion at the American officers' quarters where they resided. Despite their injuries, LT Frances L. Crumpton, NC, USN, LT Ruth Ann Mason, NC, USN, LTJG Ann D. Reynolds, NC, USN, and LT Barbara J. Wooster, NC, USN, refused treatment until all injured service personnel had been treated for their wounds. They



ENS George M. Silver— First male nurse in the Navy.

became the first American women to be awarded the Purple Heart in the Vietnam War.

## Hyperbaric Nurse—1965

In August 1965, LT Vera Noble, NC, USNR, became the first woman to make an underwater escape using the buoyant escape method in which the escapee expels air while being carried rapidly to the surface by an inflated life jacket. She also was the first student to complete the new course in applied hyperbaric medicine, designed to give nurses instruction and practice in

Navy recompression chamber technique. (Naval Submarine Medical Research Laboratory, Groton, CT)

## First male nurses—1965 On 25 August 1965, ENS C

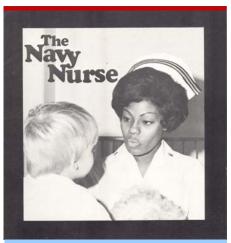
On 25 August 1965, ENS George M. Silver, a former Navy hospital corpsman, became the first man to receive a commission in the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps Reserve. On 12 October 1965, the first group of men (LTJG Jerry McClelland, ENS Charles Franklin, ENS Isadore Miller, ENS Richard Gierman, and ENS George Silver) commissioned in the Navy Nurse Corps reported to the Naval Schools Command Newport, RI for a one month course of indoctrination to the naval service.

# NSA Danang—1965

In October 1965, the Navy created the Naval Support Activity (NSA) Danang to support the Navy and Marine Corps operating in the northern provinces of South Vietnam (I Corps). Providing emergency and definitive medical care



Navy nurse checks one of her patients aboard USS *Repose*, 1967.



Navy Nurse Recruiting Booklet (1971)

for Navy and Marine Corps personnel became the mission of the Naval Support Activity Station Hospital (NSAH) which would soon become the largest land-based medical facility in Vietnam. The advanced emergency hospital center was designed to provide specialties not usually represented in the medical battalion hospitals, such as neurosurgery, dermatology, urology, plastic surgery, ophthalmology, and ENT treatment. Eighteen Navy nurses were chosen to serve in facility.

## Male Nurses in the Regular Navy—1966

Public Law 89-609 authorized male nurses to receive commissions in the regular Navy.

## Equal Promotion Opportunity—1967

Public law 90-130 gave the Nurse Corps equal promotion opportunity with line officers to the grades of captain and commander, allowing for the possibility of a rear admiral for the Nurse Corps. The law, also, removed age restrictions, instituted a "pass-over" system for the Nurse Corps, allows active duty enlisted time to be counted for retirement purposes, increased Nurse Corps membership on selection boards.

## Male Nurses on Active Duty—1968

First male nurse in the regular Navy, LT Clarence Cote, NC, USN, was augmented to the regular Navy on 5 January 1968.

# Nurses aboard Aircraft Carriers—1971

Male nurses were assigned and deployed with surgical teams to aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean.

# Nurse Practitioner Program—1971

The first Navy Nurse Corps practitioner program began.

## Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Program— 1972

The first Pediatric Navy Nurse practitioner program began in February 1972.

#### First Nurse Admiral—1972

On 26 April 1972, President Richard Nixon

CAPT Alene Duerk, Director of the Navy Nurse Corps, stands with Chief of Naval Operations, ADM Elmo Zumwalt, and Secretary of the Navy, John Warner, 1972.

approved the promotion of Nurse Corps CAPT Alene Duerk to rear admiral. RADM Duerk was the first woman in Navy history to hold flag rank.

## First Operational Medicine Nurses—1976

In 1976, Navy nurses were allowed to serve with operating forces on non-combatant ships, Marine Corps Headquarters, construction battalions, and with Fleet Marine Officer.

## First African-American Captain—1978

In October 1978, CDR Joan Bynum, NC, USN was promoted to the rank of captain. CAPT Bynum was the first African-American woman to hold this rank.

## Commanding Officer of a Navy Activity—1980

While continuing her duties as Navy Nurse Corps Director, RADM Frances T. Shea takes command of the Naval Health Sciences Education and Training Command (HSETC). She is the first nurse to serve as a commanding officer of a Navy medical activity.

## First Nurse Corps Commodore—1983

CAPT Mary J. Nielubowicz was selected for the rank of commodore and appointed Nurse Corps Director. In 1985, she is promoted to the rank of rear admiral (lower half).

## Commanding Officer of a Hospital—1983

CAPT Mary F. Hall (later RADM) took command of Naval Hospital Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on 20 July 1983. She was the first nurse to serve as the commanding officer of a Navy hospital. In 1986, Hall was selected for flag rank and appointed Director of the Navy Nurse Corps.

## Male Nurse Commanding Officer of a Hospital—1985

In May 1985 CAPT Clarence Cote was selected commanding officer of Naval Hospital Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He was the first male nurse to serve as a commanding officer of a Navy hospital.

#### First Reserve Nurse Admiral—1990

In September 1990, Marianne T. Ibach, NC, USNR, was promoted to rear admiral (lower half). She was the first reserve nurse to serve at this rank.

# Operation Safe Harbor—1991

Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, became the "Safe Harbor" for Haitian migrants. Navy nurses at Naval Hospital Guantanamo Bay were called upon to screen and care for Haitian migrants on board Coast Guard cutters and Navy ships. An additional camp was established on base where Navy nurses played an active role in establishing a sick call and infirmary to provide inpatient care. In late November, as the influx of migrants increased, a Joint Task Force was established. Medical personnel from all services participated in the care of over 12,000 Haitians.

# First Navy Nurse Hospital Ship MTF Commanding Officer—2006

In 2006, CAPT Albert Shimkus, Jr., NC, USN, was selected to command USNS *Comfort* (T-AH 20) medical treatment facility becoming the first nurse to hold such a command.

#### Global Activities—2004-Present

On 26 December 2004, a magnitude-9 earthquake resulted in tsunamis which swept across the Indian Ocean and wreaked devastation along the coastlines of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, killing over 155,000 people and leaving many more homeless. The Navy Medical Department served in the forefront of disaster relief operations. Navy medical teams with USS *Bonhomme Richard*, USS *Abraham Lincoln*, Carrier Air Wing Two, and USNS *Mercy* (T-AH 19) worked tirelessly with members of the international military community in providing medical care to needy victims.

It has been said that the Navy Medical Department is the heart of the U.S. Navy. This remains evident. Over the last few years Navy medical personnel have steamed to assist everywhere there has been a need for healthcare. Navy physicians, nurses, dentists, Medical Service Corps officers, and hospital corpsmen have been deployed to Cambodia and Sri Lanka to provide care to those with land mine blast injuries; Djibouti to conduct an industrial health survey; Baghdad as part of the Coalition Provisional Authority to assist in training the newly formed Iraqi Army in combat lifesaver skills; Zambia to conduct an HIV/AIDs research project and provide HIV lectures to Zambian military personnel; Ghana to provide humanitarian aid, civic assistance, and medical peacetime support; Honduras for a humanitarian support mission; and Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) providing medical support for those searching, recovering, and identifying the remains of U.S. service members.

## Purple Heart Nurse—2007

While serving near Habbaniyah, Iraq, CDR Lenora Langlais, NC, USN, was wounded by an exploding mortar. Despite her injury she refused to abandon her station. In 2007, CDR Langlais was awarded the Purple Heart for her sacrifice.

#### Bronze Star Nurse—2007

CDR Maureen Pennington, NC, USN, was selected for the 2007 Minerva Award by California's First Lady Maria Shriver. The Minerva Award honors the year's most remarkable women and highlights their extraordinary accomplishments. Prior to this honor, CDR Pennington was awarded the Bronze Star for her service as commander of a surgical company in Iraq.

## Nurse Corps Gala—2008

The Navy Nurse Corps celebrates its 100th Birthday.



## 1908—First Uniform

"Shirtwaist, shirt, and belt of light weight, white cotton drilling, made according to prescribed patterns and measurements; Bishop collar; cap of white Persian lawn with one inch band of black velvet; on left sleeve of the uniform, half-way between the shoulder and elbow will be embroidered the 'Geneva Red Cross'; the pin which will be the special insignia of the corps will be about the size of a silver quarter, made of heavy gold plate with a dull rough surface. The design in blue enamel will be that of an anchor combined with the caduceus, immediately under design will be the letters 'USN,' also in blue enamel." Nurses were allowed to wear the pin, or device, only after completion of the first six months of service.



# 1908—Corps Device I

"Wreath of oak leaves and a small anchor surrounding a blue enameled field surmounted by a fouled anchor with a superimposed 'U.S. shield."



# 1918—Dress Uniform/Corps Device II

"Navy blue Norfolk suit with Kitchener pockets, tan gloves, black shoes or tan boots, blue sailor hat, corps device, gold acorn and oakleaf superimposed on anchor with initials 'NNC,' worn on collars of ward uniforms; for dress uniforms, letters 'USN' for regular corps and 'US[N]R [F]' for Reserve Force nurses, cape, navy blue, belted in front, lined with scarlet flannel for wear with ward uniform." The cape, Navy blue and belted in front and lined with scarlet flannel, was to be worn with the ward uniform. A mess dress of Navy blue silk or poplin was an optional item to be worn when the indoor or outdoor uniforms were not appropriate.

# 1941—Outdoor Uniform

Authorization is granted for wearing the outdoor uniform "in distant ports and in foreign countries under severe climatic conditions."

#### 1942—First Service Dress Blues

Navy nurses adopt the first service dress blue and white uniforms consisting of white-covered caps bearing the Navy emblem but without a visor, straight skirt, double-breasted lapel coat with light blue braid sleeve stripes and corps device for the white uniform. Black or white (as appropriate) shoes and stockings.

## 1942—Corps Device III

"NNC" initials removed, fouled anchor with oakleaf and acorn retained.

## 1947—Corps device IV

Fouled anchor removed. Free oakleaf device.

#### 1950

Light blue braid sleeve stripes replaced by gold lace and the double breasted coat is changed to a single breasted one.

#### 1959

Service dress light blue uniforms are authorized for women officers.

#### 1960

Authorization of gold lace grade sleeve stripes and gold embroidered corps sleeve devices for jacket of women officers' service dress white uniform to replace white braid grade stripes and yellow embroidered corps devices.

#### 1962

Dinner dress blue and white uniforms are authorized for women officers in April 1962. Gray working uniforms are discontinued in July 1962.

#### 1972

Wearing tiara with dinner dress uniform declared optional.

#### 1973

White pant suit authorized for female Nurse Corps officers in April 1973. Uniform regulations of June 1973 change substituted gold lace of appropriate rank for the black velvet and white braid stripes on sleeves of dinner dress uniform jackets. Also, embroidered collar devices and white skirt eliminated from dinner dress uniform; black skirt to be worn with either black or white jacket.

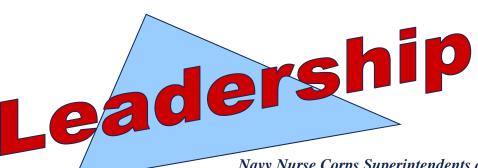


#### 1974

In March 1974, the wearing of black beret as substitute for "bucket" hat authorized for female officers. Whites, navy serge with jacket sleeves striped with gold for street wear. On formal occasions women wear a uniform with dinner jacket, complete with miniature campaign medals. Male nurse uniforms match those of Medical Corps officers except for the sleeve device.

# 1982—Discontinuation of Ward White

Ward white uniform discontinued.



Navy Nurse Corps Superintendents and Directors

Esther Voorhees Hasson Superintendent, 1908-1911

**Lenah Sutcliffe Higbee** Superintendent, 1911-1922

Josephine Beatrice Bowman Superintendent, 1922-1935

Myn M. Hoffman Superintendent, 1935-1938

**Sue Sophia Dauser** Superintendent, 1939-1946

> Nellie Jane DeWitt Director, 1946-1950

> Winnie Gibson
> Director, 1950-1954

W. Leona Jackson Director, 1954-1958

Ruth A. Houghton Director, 1958-1962

Ruth A. Erickson Director, 1962-1966

Veronica M. Bulshefski Director, 1966-1970 **Alene B. Duerk** Director, 1970-1975

Maxine Conder Director, 1975-1979

Frances T. Shea-Buckley Director, 1979-1983

Mary J. Nielobowicz Director, 1983-1987

Mary F. Hall Director, 1987-1991

**Mariann Stratton**Director, 1991-1994

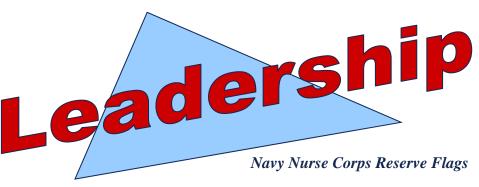
Joan M. Engel Director, 1994-1998

Kathleen L. Martin Director, 1998-2000

**Karen A. Harmeyer (USNR)** (**Interim**) Director, 2000

Nancy Lescavage Director, 2001-2005

Christine Bruzek-Kohler Director, 2005-Present



## Maryanne T. G. Ibach

Rear Admiral (lower half) Nurse Corps, United States Navy Reserve 1990

## Nancy A. Fackler

Rear Admiral (lower half) Nurse Corps, United States Navy Reserve 1994

## **Karen Harmeyer**

Rear Admiral (upper half) Nurse Corps, United States Navy Reserve 1997

#### Elizabeth M. Morris

Rear Admiral (upper half) Nurse Corps, United States Navy Reserve 2000

# **Karen Flaherty**

Rear Admiral (upper half)
Nurse Corps, United States Navy Reserve
2003

# **Cynthia Dullea**

Rear Admiral (lower half) Nurse Corps, United States Navy Reserve 2007



#### Hawaii Five-O

Episode: Murder Eyes Only (1975)

While Detective Steve McGarrett (Jack Lord) is on active duty with the naval reserve, he is ordered to help investigate the murder of a naval intelligence officer by letter bomb. This episode features a Navy nurse played by Carolyn Gayler.

## Hellcats of the Navy (1957)

CDR Casey Abbott (Ronald Reagan), World War II commander of a submarine, is in an "off again-on again" relationship with Navy nurse LT Helen Blair (Nancy Davis). While on a mission CDR Abbott is forced to leave a frogman behind to save the rest of his crew. But Abbott's second-in-command is convinced that this sacrifice was due to the fact that the dead man had been amorously pursuing LT Blair.

## Hennesey (1959-1962)

CBS television series about LT Charles "Chick" Hennesey (Jackie Cooper), a Navy physician stationed at a naval base in San Diego, CA. Actress Abby Dalton played "Martha Hale," a Navy nurse.

# *In Harm's Way* (1965)

Otto Preminger directed this film about two naval officers—CAPT Rockwell Torrey (John Wayne) and CDR Paul Eddington, Jr. (Kirk Douglas)— who try to recuperate from, and retaliate for, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Patricia Neal plays Navy nurse "LT Maggie Haynes."

#### JAG

Episode: *Pilot* (1995)

Character of "Navy nurse" played by Gia Natale

Episode: Each of Us Angels (2003)

A wounded Marine lieutenant named Ron Graham (David James Elliott) and his Navy nurse (Catherine Bell) fall in love on board a hospital ship as World War II rages off the coast of Iwo Jima. Their love affair is shattered when a kamikaze hits the hospital ship, killing the nurse.

## Mister Roberts (1955)

In the waning days of World War II, LT Doug Roberts (Henry Fonda) worries that the war is passing him by. He yearns for duty more significant than that of supervising the daily operations of a cargo transport ship in the South Pacific. LT Roberts doesn't realize how much he

means to his crew, who appreciate that he's always ready to stand up for them against the ship's tyrannical, career-minded CAPT Morton (James Cagney). In fact, Roberts is idolized by the green junior officer who shares his quarters, ENS Pulver (Jack Lemmon). When it becomes necessary to strike a bargain with the Captain for the crew's sake, Roberts almost gives up his dream—although in the end his request for transfer to active duty is granted. In his wake, Roberts leaves behind a crew of men bonded together in a way that would not have been possible without him. Featuring Betsey Palmer as Navy nurse LT Anne Girard.

#### *McHale's Navy* (1962-1966)

Television series featured a Navy nurse named "Molly Turner" (Jane Dulo) who was the love interest of LCDR Quinton McHale (Ernest Borgnine).

#### Murder in the Air (1940)

B-film starring Ronald Reagan as Secret Agent "Brass" Branigan. He tries to stop saboteurs from destroying a U.S. Navy airship. Features the character of a "Navy hospital nurse" played by Julie Stevens.

#### Navy Log

#### Episode: Not a Leg to Stand on (1956)

Episode of CBS television series inspired by the story of Navy nurse LTJG Sarah Griffin's work in the Naval Amputee Center at the Naval Hospital Oakland, CA. Episode featured actress Veda Ann Borg as LTJG Griffin.

#### *Navy Nurse* (1945)

Vitaphone short about a Navy nurse (Andrea King) in action.

# Navy NCIS: Naval Criminal Investigative Service

Episode: *SWAK* (2005)

A letter "sealed with a kiss" contaminates the NCIS office and personnel with a biological weapon. The character of Navy nurse "LT Emma Ingham" is played by Kelsey Oldershaw.

# Navy Versus the Night Monsters (1966)

A plane carrying unusual tree specimens from Antarctica crashes into a Navy base somewhere in the Pacific. At night the tree specimens reveal themselves to be acid-spitting monsters able to reproduce themselves. Mamie Van Doren plays Navy nurse protagonist "Nora Hall" who valiantly combats these "night monsters."

# Nobody's Perfect (1968)

Film comedy chronicling the misadventures of Navy petty officer "Doc" Willoughby (Doug McClure). While on shore leave, Petty Officer Willoughby falls for a seemingly demure Japanese girl in a kimono shop who turns out to be Japanese-American Navy nurse LT Tomiko Momoyama (Nancy Kwan). Much to Petty Officer Willoughby's disappointment, LT Momoyama was betrothed as a child to a traditional Japanese man named "Toshi" (James Shigeta), who fully intends on enforcing tradition. Willoughby divides his time between trying to return a stolen Buddha statue to the Japanese village it rightfully belongs to, and trying to woo this Navy nurse from Toshi.

#### Quantum Leap

## Episode: A Leap for Lisa (1992)

Dr. Sam Beckett (Scott Bakula) leaps into LT Al Calavicci as a young navy pilot facing charges of raping and murdering a commander's wife. In the original history, a married Navy nurse, LT Lisa Sherman (Terry Farrell), testifies for LT Calavicci. But Dr. Beckett accidentally tells LT Sherman not to testify and she dies in a car wreck later that night. As the odds increase that LT Calavicci will be convicted and sent to the gas chamber. Dr. Beckett, and future-version of Al Calavicci must work to prove his innocence.

#### Pearl Harbor (2001)

Michael Bay directed the film about two Navy pilots, and childhood friends, Rafe (Ben Affleck) and Danny (Josh Hartnett) who fall in love with the same woman, a Navy nurse named LT Evelyn Johnson (Kate Beckinsale).

#### Purple Hearts (1984)

Navy surgeon Don Jardian (Ken Wahl) and nurse Deborah Solomon (Cheryl Ladd) fall in love while serving in the Vietnam War. Their affection for one another provides a striking contrast to the violence of warfare.

#### South Pacific (Stage —1949; First film adaptation —1958)

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II musical about Navy nurse ENS Nellie Forbush (Mary Martin on stage/Mitzi Gaynor on screen) and French planter Emile de Becque (Ezio Pinza on stage/Rossano Brazzi on screen) set on a South Pacific island in 1943.

## Stars and Stripes Forever (1952)

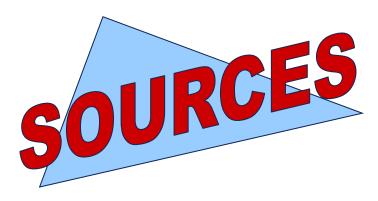
Biopic about the "March King" John Philip Sousa (Clifton Webb). Actress (Florence Shirley) has an uncredited role as a Navy nurse.

# Tell it to the Marines (1926)

Wonderful, but overlooked, silent film about the "tougher than nails" Marine drill sergeant O'Hara (Lon Chaney) and his polar opposite, PVT "Skeets" Burns (William Haines). If Burns's lackadaisical approach to the military were not bad enough, he also makes advances on Navy nurse Nora Dale (Eleanor Boardman), whom SGT O'Hara secretly loves. Nora is oblivious to SGT O'Hara's feelings and is attracted to the handsome "Skeets." But an indiscretion turns her against him, and it takes an expedition to China and a battle with a warlord's bandit brigade to sort things out among the nurse and her two Marines.

# Torpedo Alley (1953)

LT Bob Bingham (Mark Stevens) a former carrier pilot re-enters the Navy as a submarine officer. While at the naval training base in Groton, CT, LT Bingham renews an acquaintance with two former Navy colleagues and falls in love with the Navy nurse, LT Susan Peabody (Dorothy Malone), who is dating one of them .



# **BUMED Library and Archives**

- —Hospital Files
- —Hospital Ship Files
- —Nurse Corps Historical Files
- —Oral History Collection

Godson, Susan. Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001

Sterner, Doris. In and Out of Harm's Way: A History of the Navy Nurse Corps. Seattle, WA: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1996

# **Internet:**

**Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com)**